



# Short Safety Subject

## **The ABCs of Air Bags**

While most soldiers already know that by regulation they are required to wear seatbelts whenever they are in a moving vehicle, on post or off. But do you know anything about your car's air bag?

Since 1987, there have been more than 3.3 million air bag deployments. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), air bags have saved the lives of more than 4,100 people who otherwise may have died in vehicle crashes. Air bags save lives, but they work best when drivers and passengers properly secure themselves by lap and shoulder belts, and move their seats as far back as possible.

Since 1990, 58 adults and 74 children have reportedly died in crashes as a result of air bag injuries. According to NHTSA, of the 74 children killed, 71 were either not restrained, improperly restrained, or were in a rear-facing infant seat in front of a passenger air bag. Of the adults who died, most were not buckled up and many were sitting too close to the air bag when it deployed.

Soldiers, DOD civilians, and their families can benefit from the use of air bags and virtually eliminate the risks by following the ABCs of air bag safety: Always slide the seat back as far as possible and sit back. Your seat should be in the upright position. Many people believe the closer you are to the steering wheel, the better control you have over the vehicle. The steering wheel itself is the primary cause of injury in a crash involving drivers sitting too close to the wheel. It is important to sit back as far as possible from the steering wheel whether or not the vehicle is equipped with air bags. That is why short-stature individuals are among the more than 4,100 people whose lives have been saved by air bags.

Buckle everyone in the vehicle. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure everyone is buckled up. NHTSA estimates that the combination of an air bag plus a lap/shoulder belt reduces the risk of serious head injury by 75 percent, compared with a 38 percent reduction for belts alone. Children 12 and under should ride properly restrained in the back seat.

Bottom line: The air bag provides the protection it was designed for, but only when used with seatbelts.